

Thessalonica, Berea and Athens

Acts 17:1-34

Introduction:

Good leadership demands flexibility. Back in the 1990's there was a huge movement within churches to follow the Willow Creek model. Willow Creek church was a large church in Chicago (about 15,000 members then, 25,000 now!) led by Pastor Bill Hybels. Whatever Rev. Hybels was doing, every church in North America felt it needed to do as well. There were seminars and books, training sessions and fellowships to replicate the good ministry happening in Chicago. The problem was most of us did not live in suburban Chicago. I was pastoring in a small town of five thousand people with a church under one hundred in attendance. Little of what Willow Creek was doing fit our circumstances. And what we were doing in that farming community would never work in Chicago (we had a horse and buggy pick up kids for Sunday School!)

The Apostle Paul was a wise man, and as he travelled from community to community he shared one message, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. However, he presented that message differently, depending on the audience. In the passage before us he will be in three different communities and will share one message three different ways. His flexibility is a great model to us as well.

Paul and Silas in Thessalonica – Acts 17:1-9

1. Where does Paul start his ministry in Thessalonica (v. 2)? Why there?
2. What facts did Paul show the Thessalonians from scripture (Old testament) according to verse 3? How significant was it they see Jesus as the Christ?



17:2. The reference to **three Sabbath days** does not mean the missionary band stayed only three weeks in Thessalonica. Paul carried on the work with a Jewish emphasis for three Sabbaths and then turned to Gentiles and ministered to them for some weeks after that. This was the situation for three reasons: (1) The Philippian church sent money to Paul at least twice during this visit (Phil. 4:15–16), implying a longer lapse of time than three weeks. (2) In addition, Paul supported himself by manual labor (1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:7–10). This may indicate that considerable time elapsed before the aid from Philippi arrived. (3) Most of the converts at Thessalonica were not from the synagogue but were Gentiles steeped in idolatry (cf. 1 Thes. 1:9).¹

3. What was the result of Paul and Silas' preaching in Thessalonica according to verse 4? Who responded to their message?
4. Not all were excited about the conversion of the Thessalonians. Who was upset (v. 5)? How did they respond? What was their intent?
5. Finding Paul and Silas were not at Jason's house (the house church host), what did the crowd do? (vs. 6) What accusation do they level against Jason? (v. 6-7)
6. Verse 8 says that the people and city authorities were disturbed when they heard Paul and Silas were preaching what message? (v. 7-8) Why?
7. How did Jason and the other Christian brothers who had been arrested secure their release (v.9)?

Paul and Silas in Berea – Acts 17:10-15

8. How did Paul and Silas arrive at Berea? (v. 10) Where did they go for shelter? (v. 10)

¹ Toussaint, S. D. (1985). [Acts](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 401). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

9. In verse 11 the Bereans are said to be more noble than the people of Thessalonica. What two things did the Bereans do that might have caused Luke to say they were more noble (v. 11)?
10. Who responded to the message of Christ in Berea (v. 12)?
11. Where did the troublemakers come from (v. 13)? Who were they?
12. What was the response of the believers in Berea to the opposition the Gospel was experiencing (v. 14)? Why is just Paul sent away? What did Timothy and Silas likely do?
13. Those who transported Paul to safety took him to which city? (v. 15) As they departed what message did Paul give to them to back carry to Berea?

Paul in Athens – Acts 17:16-21

14. What was Paul doing according to verse 16? How was he feeling? Why?
15. As Paul waited for his companions, what did he do (vs. 17)?

Epicureans—a well-known school of *atheistic materialists*, who taught that pleasure was the chief end of human existence; a principle which the more rational interpreted in a refined sense, while the sensual explained it in its coarser meaning.²

Stoics—a celebrated school of *severe and lofty pantheists*, whose principle was that the universe was under the law of an iron necessity, the spirit of which was what is called the Deity: and that a passionless conformity of the human will to this law, unmoved by all external circumstances and changes, is the perfection of virtue. While therefore the Stoical was in itself superior to the Epicurean system, both were alike hostile to the Gospel. “The two enemies it has ever had to contend with are the two ruling principles of the Epicureans and Stoics—*Pleasure and Pride*” [HOWSON].³

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 202). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 202). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

16. What were the two responses of the Greek Philosophers towards Paul as he shared with them the message of Jesus? (v. 18)

17. Where is Paul taken by those listening to his presentation of Jesus (v. 19)?

The Council of the Aeropagus was responsible to watch over both religion and education in the city, so it was natural for them to investigate the “new doctrine” Paul was teaching. They courteously invited Paul to present his doctrine at what appears to have been an informal meeting of the council on Mars’ Hill. Paul was not on trial; the council members only wanted him to explain what he had been telling the people in the *agora*. After all, life in Athens consisted in hearing and telling new things, and Paul had something new!⁴

18. Luke sums up the reason why the people were willing to listen to Paul in verse 21. What does he say? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Paul’s Address – Acts 17:22-34

19. How does Paul begin his address to the Athenians (vss. 22-23)? Was this a good approach? What was he doing? How did he set up the argument to point to the one true God?

20. Where does Paul start his presentation on the one true God (v. 24)? Why is this a good place to begin?

21. What contrast does Paul make between the God he represents and the gods of the Greeks? (v. 24-25)

22. Verse 26 takes us to another reality that could open the door to dialogue with people different from oneself. What truth does Paul present here?

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 472). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

23. In verses 26-27 Paul tells how God set allotted periods and dwelling places. What is this? What was God's purpose throughout history (v. 27)?
24. Paul then quotes two passages from Greek philosophers. What was the message of these two quotes (v. 28)? What does this reveal about Paul?
25. In verse 29 Paul debunks idols (carved images). What is his argument?
26. Paul now gives the call to decision: we must turn away from false gods to the One True God. Why is this so important? (vss. 29-30) Who is the judge?
27. The people seemed to ignore the point about the judgement (as people still do today) and instead focus on the idea of resurrection. (v. 32) What was the response to the idea of resurrection?
28. It seemed Paul hit a very closed minded group. Was his work in vain (v. 33)? (tradition tells us Dionysius was a judge in the [Areopagus](#) Court in Athens, and would become the bishop of the church in Athens)

Conclusion

This chapter outlines three communities, and three different responses to the Gospel. No doubt the hardest group to reach was the Greeks of Athens. At the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus.

It was the doctrine of the Resurrection that most of the members of the Council could not accept. To a Greek, the body was only a prison; and the sooner a person left his body, the happier he would be. Why raise a dead body and live in it again? And why would God bother with a personal judgment of each man? This kind of teaching was definitely incompatible with Greek philosophy. They believed in immortality, but not in resurrection.⁵

Despite the challenge of sharing the Gospel in Athens, Paul was faithful to the task. It is a good reminder for us today: do not let rejection stop you from being a faithful witness. Let God determine the harvest – we are just to plant the seed.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 474). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.